

The Role of *‘Ulama* in Countering Boko Haram Insurgency: A pattern
of the *Al-azhar ‘Ulama*

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ABSTRACT

The eruption of the *boko haram* and its insurgency in 2008 lead to colossal loss of lives and properties unprecedented in the history of northern Nigeria since after independence. various tools and approaches have been employed in analyzing the phenomena with a view to proffering solution to it. People of different walk of life including professionals and experts have expressed their views and opinions about the group its activities and ways of curtailing them. While some have recommended calm down on the group others have called for dialogue with it. Some have even recommended amnesty for its members. As the group is rightly or wrongly associated and identified with Islam in its activities, experts specially ‘*Ulama* analyse the group from Islamic perspective using the Qur’an and Sunnah and the actions of the *salaf* as their basis with a view to proffering solution(s) to the problem of the group. It is against this background that this paper intends to examine the role of the *Ulama* in confronting the *Boko Haram* imbroglio using the model of the Al Azhar University ‘*Ulama* in particular.

INTRODUCTION

The name *Boko Haram* is a name of a deviant militant Islamic group that emerged in northern Nigeria in the mid-1990s. Initially the group calls itself “*Ahlussunnah wal-jamā’a ala minhajji as-salaf*” meaning “people of the way of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the community (of muslims) in line with the earliest generation of Muslims” but later when the group turns militant it started calling itself “*Jamā’atu Ahlussunnah lida’awati wal jihad*” which means “people committed to the propagation of the prophets teachings and striving in the cause of Allah) .

Boko is a *Hausa* word meaning “western/ formal Education or western ideology” or “westernization” in its entirety. In classical *Hausa* language it means “deception” because of the experience of the people of the region with the colonial masters who used western/formal education to lure them into accept Christianity. “Haram” on the other hand is an Arabic word which means “prohibited,” or “forbidden” (Da’awa co-ordination council of Nigeria; 2009) *Boko* –*haram* therefore, would mean either “western /Formal/ secular education is islamically prohibited or forbidden or “evangelism deceptively camouflage as western education is islamically unacceptable or both. The name has its origin in media and public or community coinage perhaps due to the groups condemnation of western education, which they set as the main cause of all the problems facing the Muslim *ummah*.(Da’awa co-ordination council of Nigeria; 2009)

The group started like many other movement as a religious study groups in the mosque’s holding intermittent public preaching, however, the group becomes militant after several skirmish attack with the Nigerian security agents and after the eventual killing the group leader Muhammad Yusuf. (Hassan; 2015) The killing Yusuf provided the group with a justification for further violence which extended to the civilian population in different northern states from 2010 –2015. Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau *Boko Haram* destroyed thousands of human lives and properties on a massive scale, resulting in at least 14,000 toll of human deaths as documented by the media as of July 3, 2015 and the displacement of 1.2 million people. (Campbell, July 6, 2015; UNHRC statistical snapshot, July 6, 2015).

Various tools and parameters have been employed by different people from different walks of life including professionals and religious scholars/groups and organisations in Nigeria and other Muslim countries in analysing the *boko Haram* group and its nefarious activities with a view to proffering feasible solutions to its mayhem that has bedeviled the whole Muslim *Ummah* especially as the group was formed supposedly Muslims and, rightly or wrongly claims to have the advancement of Islam as its mission.

The evolution of Boko Haram group

The *Boko Haram* as mentioned earlier, started like any other movement or groups as a religious groups formed by Muslims to advance the cause of Islam the formation of such in groups, societies or associations in Islam is usually based on surah 3:103 of the glorious Qur’an

which urges Muslims to constitute themselves into a group for the purpose of enjoining good on people and forbidding evils for them the verse reads thus:

“Let there arise among you (Muslims) a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong they are the ones to attain felicity” (Qur’an 3:104).

This verse according to Abdulhakeem (2016) has been the motivating factor for Muslim not only in forming groups, societies or associations but also in striving to correct societal evils. They see themselves as duty bound do so particularly that the verse ends with the description of those who do so as ones who attain felicity. Going by its official name “Boko haram” could not have otherwise been formed. Evidences on its founder and the activities of the group prior to its militarization point at this. Muhammad Yusuf, a radical self-proclaimed Islamic cleric who founded the group, for example was said to have been a member of the Islamic brotherhood group of Ibraheem el-zakzakiy in Zaria but when the group was accused of shi’ah tendencies and consequently broke into two Muhammad Yusuf joined the *Jamāatul tajdidil Islam* group, (Abdulahakim;2016) he was however said to have later found the teachings of the *tajdid* group also unpleasant and therefore founded his own group in 2002. His followers according to (Hassan 2015;) were initially called *Yusifiyya* but later *ahlussunnah wal jama’ah ala minhaji ssalaf* which means (The people of the prophetic tradition on the methodology of pious predecessors).

The group started its activities as a religious study group in the mosque holding intermittent public preaching. As its following increased of its provision of welfare services, it modified its name to *Ahlussunnah wal jama’ah ala minhas as-salaf* (the people of the prophet tradition and the organization on the methodology of the pious predecessors) to emphasize orthodoxy not only in theological but also in social and political ideals. (Muhammad; 2000 Abdallah; 2011)

A cardinal preaching of the group is that western education is the main cause of corruption which according to them is the mother of all the problems facing the Muslim ummah and should therefore be rejected in its entirety by the Muslim. (Hassan;2015, Abdulhakeem; 2016) alternatively, the Muslims should subscribe to another system of education based purely on the teachings of the Qur’an and sunnah as understood by the earliest generations of Muslim (*salaf*) hence the name *Boko haram*. before long many of those who listened to Yusuf’s sermons withdrew from school others stopped sending their children and wards to school and those who

had acquired one certificate or another burnt them.(Abdulhakeem;2016) In his famous debate with Mallam Isah Ali Fantami, Yusuf was reported to have expressed that if the environment for the cultivation of Boko (non – Islamic education) meets the Islamic requirement of separating the genders, and if theories at variance with the teaching of the Qur'an are expunged then Boko is acceptable and can be cultivated.(Hassan;2010) Mallam Sani Umaru one of the earlier proponents of the group elucidate this belief further where he argues thus:

Boko haram does not in any way means Western education is a sin as the infidel media continue to portray us, Boko haram actually means western Civilisation is forbidden. The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the west... which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by western Education(Nigex News August 17, 2009)

At different times, prominent Islamic scholars, activist and *da'awa* workers engaged in dialogue and debates with the leadership and followers of the group, challenging Muhammad Yusuf's position as not in tandem with the teachings of the *Salaf* and also drawing his attention to the socio-political and economic implications of his position especially on the people of Northern Nigeria who are educationally disadvantaged compared with their counterparts in other part of the country. In order to either convince them of their wrong position or to dissuade others from joining the group. The dialogues and debates succeeded to some extent in convincing some members of the group from rejecting their ideology other Muslims started boycotting and disassociating themselves from Boko haram functions and members. This according to some analyst might have contributed in leading some of the Boko haram members to go extreme by eliminating some Islamic scholars, a case in point was late Sheik Ja'afar Mahmood Adam who was assassinated in 2006 for what some people attributed to his Steen opposition to the group's ideology. (Hassan; 2015, Abdulhakeem; 2016)

The *Boko haram* came into prominence and public notice in 2008 when the group becomes a militant group. While details of the circumstances surrounding its militarization still remain sketchy perhaps due to the killing of the foundation members of the groups who would have explain better, its founder Muhammad Yusuf was reported to have claimed during a *tafsir* session in Maiduguri that some mobile policemen attacked and injured same members of the group and would not also allow families and friends to visit them in the hospital where they were receiving treatment. He was said to have further claimed that attempts by members of the group

to visit the injured in the hospital attracted the brutal by of the police and several members of the group were killed. Yusuf further maintained that while those killed were being taken for burial the policemen further attacked them and killed some of his members. He then vowed never to take kindly to this as he and member of his group were determined to fight back.

(Abdulahakeem;2016) the group made good its treats by attacking police formations in Maiduguri where the group's headquarters is located. The then president and commander in chief of Nigeria Umaru MusaYa'r Adua perhaps acting on intelligence report ordered a clampdown on members of the group which lead to the capture and eventual massacre of Muhammad Yusuf in the hand of the Nigerian police an act that further aggravated the crisis as member of the group become fully militarized engaging and waging murderous warfare against not only state forces but also innocent civilians at schools, places of worship, markets and motor parks among others were targeted resulting in the destruction of human lives and properties on a massive scale, resulting in at least 14,000 toll of human deaths as documented by the media as of July 3, 2015 and the displacement of 1.2 million people. (Da'awa co-ordination council of Nigeria; 2209)

An inventory of some of the nefarious activities associated with or for which the group claims responsibility include; Bauchi prison break of 7th September, 2010; Abuja attack of 31st December, 2010; Yola jail break of 22nd April, 2011; a series of bombings in some states in northern Nigeria on 29th May 2011, bombing of Nigeria police Headquarters, Abuja, on 16th June 2011, bombing of the united Nations' Building at Abuja on 26th August, 2011, the massacre of hundred Muslim faithful during Friday Prayer at the Kano Central Mosque on 26th February 2014 the abduction of hundreds females secondary school students of Government Girls College Chibok in Borno State on 14th April 2014 and many others.

The nature and dimension of the attacks of Boko haram have made it difficult for analyst, commentators and even Islamic scholars to describe the group and what it stand for. Especially as a good number of the attacks were suicidal. When the attack was on the church, Christian leaders were often quick to say the group was targeting Christian with a view to Islamising the country and the Muslim reacted by debunking the allegation. While the "debate" was on, the group would shift its attack to the Muslim no sooner would the Muslims claim they were vindicated that the group would attack people from the eastern part of the country who had settled and are residing in the north, annalist and commentators would then interpret the group

action and mission as aiming at the disintegration of the country. When the attack was on government establishment and security institution people read political meanings into it claiming it was a play of politicians of northern extraction to destabilise the then president Goodluck Jonathan's southern-led government which the former had earlier objected to.

At times the group backed down certain individuals including politicians and leading Islamic scholars of the region. Some of the attacks were even carried out in the month of Ramadan in which Muslims worldwide fast and which they hold in very high esteem. In short the group's activation have defied all forms of description no sooner would one perfectly describe the situation than happenings and events necessitated a modification of the description.

Analysis of Boko Haram ideologies from Islamic Perspective:

As mentioned earlier a number of Muslim Scholars, activists and *Da'awah* workers had been involved, in dialogues and debates with the leadership and followers of Boko Haram group in order to either refute their erroneous position, or to dissuade others from joining the group, especially as the group is claiming the basis of their beliefs and activities from Islam. Prominent among such scholars included Sheikh Abdulwahab Abdallah (from Kano), Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim Fantami (from Bauchi), Sheikh Muhammad Bin Usman (from Kano), late Sheikh Muhammad Auwal Albani (from Zaria) and late Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmood Adam (from Kano) and a host of other scholars. Islamic organizations and groups such as Da'awa co-ordination council of Nigeria (DCCN), Muslim students society of Nigeria (MSSN) *Jamā'atu Izalatil bid'ah wa iqāmati ssunnah* (JIBWIS) and some Universities. While some scholars such as Quadri (2013:) have on the basis of the nefarious activities of the group disassociated it from Islam, others feel that the group started like any other groups formed by Muslims to advance the cause of Islam, but later derailed and become militarized as a result of the brutality of the Nigeria's security agencies on its members and the eventual killing of their leader.

In his famous debate with Fantami, Yusuf said if the environment for the cultivation of Boko (Western Education meets the Islamic requirement of separating the genders, and if theories at variance with the teachings of the Qur'an are expunged, then Boko is acceptable and he went further to fault the influence of western education on Muslims of ideas and theories at variance with Islam (1.e. western education) for the pervasive corruption of Nigerians public

sector, rendering it haram (Hassan; 2015). If this position as based position is based on the teachings of Islam on education, one would see that it will fail flat.

One distinguishing feature between Islam and other religions is the prominence attached to law in its practice. There is virtually nothing done in the religion or by a Muslim that there is no law supporting it. In order to ascertain the position of Islam regarding anything, Muslims are enjoined to refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah (Practice of the Prophet P.b.u.h), while respecting the methodology and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*Usul-al-fiqh*), and the higher objectives of Shari'ah (*Maqasid-ash-Shari'ah*) according to Da'awah co-ordination council of Nigeria any education that is useful and which does not go against the explicit teaching of the Qur'an and Sunnah is permissible (*Halal*), depending on the position of Islamic jurisprudence of specific subject and the purpose of studying it, that knowledge or education could be considered as either an obligation (*Fard* or *Wajib*), recommended (*Mustahab*), merely permissible (*Halal*), discourage (*Makruh*) or forbidden (*Haram*).

The search for knowledge leads to new knowledge, and Islam encourages the search for useful knowledge. Every generation of Muslim scholars adds new insights and interpretations to the commentaries of the Qur'an and Sunnah by acquiring new knowledge in the fields of History, Geography, Biology, Psychology, Economics, Ecology, Astronomy etc. the Qur'an and Sunnah encourage Muslims to seek useful knowledge in all fields of human endeavors. Knowledge, education or Boko cannot therefore be prohibited (haram) simply because it is modern or new. It has to contradict the clear teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah before it can be considered prohibited (*haram*).

The truth, falsehood, benefit or otherwise of information and knowledge is not assessed on the basis of whether such information is indigenous or foreign, Islamic law does not classify information or knowledge on the basis of its geographical or cultural origin; but on the basis of whether it contradicts the Qur'an or Sunnah or not, while respecting the methodology of *Usul al fiqh* and the higher objectives (*Maqasid*) of Shari'ah. If it contradicts the Qur'an or Sunnah, then it is rejected. Otherwise it may be considered on its own merit and its consonance with the objectives of Shari'ah and the common good (*Maslaha*).

According to some scholars the term "Secular" when applied to knowledge or education is used to refer to worldly (*Dunawiy*), or material education, where knowledge gained is derived from observations, experimentation, and the scientific method of rational analysis and not from

religious sources or divine revelation i.e. not spiritual or religious education. For example, Agriculture, Accounting, Linguistics, Mathematics, Engineering, Defense, Medicine, Communication and Information Technology are regarded as secular or worldly subjects in that their knowledge is not derived from religious scriptures. Muslim scholars however do not classify these subjects or fields as secular or irreligious as distinct from spiritual or religious knowledge. They are classified under the category of *Mu'amalat* where every innovation and new knowledge is permissible, except what is authoritatively prohibited. In fact those fields such as medicine, agriculture, commerce, security, education that are essential for the public benefit (*Maslaha*) and general survival or absolute necessities (i.e. *daruriyyat*) of a good and just society, are not just considered permissible (*halal*) but a societal or collective obligation (*fardu kifaya*) that must be studied. To neglect these aspects of life is harmful evil (*mafsada*), which the community (or its leaders) will be held accountable for by Allah. (Da'awah co-ordination council in Nigeria; 2009).

In addition, scholars (of *Usul-al-fiqh*) maintain that what is a prerequisite for the performance or realization of an obligation (*fard*) itself becomes regarded as an obligation (*fard*). If for instance the study and practice of Agriculture and Medicine are *Fardu Kifaya* (collective societal obligation), then their prerequisite subjects such as Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Language become regarded as *Fardu Kifaya* this is because, without these basic subjects, professions like medicine and agriculture would cease to fulfill their functions effectively in modern world.

The method of Al-azhar Scholars in combating extremism

Al-Azhar University is the world largest and the third oldest Islamic university. Located in Cairo—the capital of Egypt founded in 309 A.H (970 A.D) with many branches in most of Egyptian provinces, (Hussam 2017). Al-azhar main objectives is to serve as a center of imparting Islamic culture, tolerance, and ethics, and denouncing extremism, sectarian and political intolerance among the Muslim globally. The University has set up many centers and departments with a view to achieving its goals and or objectives. ()

1. *Darul – iftah al misriy*

This is a center established to keep Muslims in touch with religious principles, through clarifying the right way, and removing doubts concerning religious and worldly life.

The Mission and activities of Dar-al-Ifta al-Misriyyah.

Manned by highly qualified graduates, who are conversant of the basics of Islamic *Da'awah* and fatwah locally and internationally, the center receives questions and inquiries on various Islamic issues either verbally or through telephone or e-mail where the questions are answered by the fatwa council. According to the latest statistics, the number of verbal and written *fatwa* issued by Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah in answer to telephone, ordinary mail, e-mail, and fax are approximately 50, 000. (At-tayyib; 2014)

i.. Issuing various religious statements

The center issued statements on current and contemporary issues prevailing in the Muslim world examples include the occupation of Iraq, hindrance of wearing Hijab on the Muslims in France, slandering the companions of the prophet, the vicious bombings that terrorizes people and so forth.

ii. Answering misconceptions about Islam

The center issues answers to misconceptions that cause confusions concerning matters of religion both from Muslims and non-Muslims in this regard a whole section on the Dar's website is dedicated exclusively for answering these misconceptions. A team of researchers are assigned the duty of collecting misconceptions and answering them with evidence from the book of Allah and Sunnah

iii. Offering scholarship and organising seminars and conferences

The center also offers scholarships in one of the Islamic sciences departments at al-Azhar University such as *Usulu-deen*, Islamic Shari'ah, Arabic Language, Arabic and Islamic Studies and Islamic *Da'awah*. at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. It also organizes seminars, conferences and training to different scholars in various specializations from all countries of the world, with emphasizes to countries suffering from the cancer of terrorism such as Nigeria and Syria.

iv. Al-azhar observer

As a means of combating the menace of extremist ideas and ideologies that is prevalent in the Muslim world this department was created on 3rd June 2015 by the grand mufti of Egypt. It is designed to serve as the focal eyes of al-azhar in combating extremist and terrorist in the Muslim world where it operates in eight different languages thus; English, French, German, Persian, Urdu, Chinese, Spanish and other African languages. The observer monitors the entire world terrorist and extremist events and day to day news, where they analyse and react swiftly to all misconceptions and distortions relating to Islam. The employees of Al-azhar Observer were chosen from among the highly educated scholars who master the foreign languages.

The main activities of observer are:

- a. Creating awareness campaigns to shed more light on the misconceptions presented by terrorist groups whose ideology is based upon misinterpretation of Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions.
- b. Refuting and countering the terrorist deviant ideologies through presenting a counter narrative and clarifying the brilliant facts of Islam stemmed from the Glorious Qur'an, authentic Prophetic traditions and the statements of the righteous ancestors
- c. Organizing and Participating in international conferences and forums on the peril of extremist groups and their effects on the Muslim *Ummah*
- d. responding to all what is raised by the enemies of Islam using the world wide web, social media, newspapers, world magazines, journals as well as all the research centers interested in the Islamic affairs which all aim at distorting the image of Islam.

Below are some examples of the responses and replies to some of the terrorist beliefs and thoughts by al-azhar observer;

1. On a reply to the Allegation that Killing Policemen and the Armed Forces Men is a Jihad

The concept of Jihad in Islam has nothing to do with such allegation posed by those criminal terrorists. Jihad, in essence, communicates a true, spiritual meaning that cannot be understood by those criminal killers. It means to exert one's efforts and to strive against what might cause harm to oneself, others or even any of the constituents of life around us. It also includes striving against the Satan, the clear-cut enemy to man. This latter kind is known as Al-Jihad Al-Akbar (The Highest Level of Jihad). The meaning of Jihad may furthermore entail exerting efforts to ward off the aggression of others, a meaning which is crystal clear in the Saying of Allah, the Almighty, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors." (The Quran, 2:190) It is thus clear that Jihad is not but a means to resist aggression. In other words, it can never be a means of initiating aggression.

Based on this, we stress that all that attacks waged against our soldiers in the Armed Forces or the Police Apparatus are terrorist attacks, which have nothing to do with Jihad at all; rather, it defames the true, spiritual meaning of the term.

2. On the legality of Killing Non-Muslims in Non-Muslim Countries and Leaving their Homelands as Abodes of War (Dar al-Harb) to join ISIS

(To them) this is the Islamic homeland. This is similar to what is going on in European countries because of misinterpreting the concept of abode of disbelief (abode of war) and abode of peace. Scholars mentioned these two terms for their historical background, but the contemporary fanatics misperceived this as they came to consider the abode of war to be every country where the Shariah of Islam is not enforced. They think that the people of these countries are not granted protection and that their souls and wealth are vulnerable and only may be protected by a treaty with the Muslims. This can be refuted by clarifying that the classification made by jurists was not intended to exclude those Muslims living in non-Muslim lands from Islam. It is rather a classification that serves as a basis upon which rulings can be implemented, just like the classification of the globe into political territories. The underlying objective of this classification is to apply Shar'iah rulings for non-Muslims based upon whether they are inside or outside their homeland. An example of this is the statement of Ibn Qayyem Al-Jawziyyah in his book Ahkam Ahl Al-Dhimmah that if a foundling is found in an Islamic territory it shall be deemed to be a Muslim, but if it is found in a non-Muslim territory it shall be a disbeliever. Some Shafi'i scholars held that if a foundling is found in a territory where the majority are disbelievers it shall be deemed to be a Muslim, for it may be concealing its faith.

3. On restricting Jihad to Combat

The fanatics restricted the concept of Jihad to combat, restricted combat to killing, and confined Jihad to Jihad of demand (Jihad At-Talab) based upon certain verses and hadiths such as:

"And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah is worse than killing. And do not fight them at al-Masjid al-Haram until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers" (Q 1:191),

"Fight them until there is no [more] fitnah and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors" (Q 1:193), and

"Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled" (Q 9:29).

This may be refuted by the fact that jurists have divided jihad into two types: jihad of demand which becomes legal when the Muslim ruler – whatever political title he may have – declares jihad in the cause of Allah in defense of and under the banner of Islam. After jihad had been approved, it was never reported that the companions of the Prophet – who were the best generation – went to the community of disbelievers to kill them except under the banner of jihad and with the permission of a Muslim leader capable of carrying out jihad.

Defensive Jihad (Jihad Al-Dafa'): this is when disbelievers attack a Muslim country. The people of this country must fight them back with the permission of a Muslim ruler and under the banner of Islam. This matter is imposed by the need to defend the

nation and its sovereignty. This sound opinion is supported and agreed upon by international laws. What we have pointed is the consensus of the scholars.

Who Are to be Fought in the Battlefield? It is impermissible to kill women, children or old people. Only for the warriors who carry weapons to fight the Muslims can be killed. This is evident in Allah's statement, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors" (Q 2:190). Moreover, the need for jihad of demand has vanished nowadays simply because that sort of jihad aimed mainly at conveying the message of Islam to people and combating those who stood as an obstacle to this aim. Thus, jihad was permitted to ward off hiraabah, not to eliminate disbelief. They could not perceive that jihad in a more inclusive sense is done with the heart, through calling to the worship of Allah, and honoring parents as many hadiths have shown. If the main purpose of Jihad was to eradicate disbelief none of the disbelievers could ever remain alive in the countries that Muslims conquered. During this age of satellites and the internet, the message and call to Islam have become available to the whole world. All in all, Jihad is allowed only with the permission of a Muslim ruler who is able to perform it in the cause of Allah with the aim of making the Word of Allah supreme. As for their citation of the aforementioned verses then it is not correct, for the imperative verb "fight" undoubtedly indicates defensive fighting and not the fight of demand simply because the conjugation of (Mufa'alah) in Arabic indicates involvement of more than one party, as inferred by the context of the verse: "and expel them from wherever they have expelled you" (Q 2:191). Thus, it is a fight to ward off attacks, not to initiate such attacks. This opinion is further supported by the end of the verse "And if they cease, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (Q 2:192). The verse from chapter At-Tawbah makes it clear for any sane person that it was revealed concerning the disbelievers of Mecca and does not constitute a general case. However, it was revealed in an exaggerative word form to denote that this fighting occurs between two fighting parties. Thus, it is defensive fighting rather than demand fighting

4. On labeling their Opponents as Disbelievers

The Islamic Sharia seeks to free people from all kinds of submission, except to Allah, the Almighty, and teaches that belief or disbelief is an affair between the worshipper and his God alone. Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] instructed us to deal with people based on what they say, and not to judge them by what they bear in their hearts. We are not allowed to scrutinize people's hearts. No one can know what is in another's heart but Allah. So, we judge people by their outward deeds and Allah judges their inward intentions.

The practice of the terrorist groups of labeling their opponents and those who do not adopt their bloody ideology as disbelievers has nothing to do with Islam. When doing so, they violate all Islamic teachings in this regard. Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] warned every Muslim against declaring their fellow Muslims as disbelievers, shedding their blood, seizing their properties and violating their honor. Such terrorist groups use terminology such as kafir (infidel) murtadd (apostate) to describe those who reject their extremist ideology, and thus find a pretext for shedding their blood and destroying their houses. This definitely goes against the teachings of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) clearly defined belief (iman) when he was asked about it by angel Jibril as "Belief is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in God's Preordainment both its good and its bad." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). All Muslim scholars agree that belief is an inward affair, and that no one is to be declared disbeliever until she/he declares their denial to the Islamic teachings. Prophet

Muhammad says, "If a man says to his brother, O Kafir (disbeliever)!" Then surely one of them is as such (i.e., a Kafir)." [Al-Bukhari 5/2264]

5. On aggression against Houses of Worship

Aggression against Houses of Worships and killing worshippers therein are totally prohibited in Islam. In other words, they have nothing at all to do either with Islam or with his teachings. In actuality, the Islamic Shari'ah, along with all the other laws, have confirmed the obligation of preserving Ad-Daruriyat Al-Khams (The Five Ultimate Objectives of the Shari'ah), including: religion, soul, intellect, honor and property. That is to say, shedding blood, under all laws and religions, is prohibited and that life is protected and dignified. Thus, we strongly stress that killing one innocent soul is like killing all mankind, a ruling which is clearly mentioned in the Saying of Allah, the Almighty, "...whoever kills a person, unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land, it is as he kills all mankind; and whoever saves a life, it is as he saves the lives of all mankind..." (The Quran, 5:32)

These terrorist and aggressive attacks can in no way be classified as an act of Jihad, because the latter was prescribed by Islam to ward off aggression and corruption; Allah says: "And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits." (The Quran, 2:190)

In fact, Islam has guaranteed freedom of worship for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It further shows great respect for Houses of Worship, and thus it is totally innocent from all these terrorist actions falsely attributed to its teachings. Moreover, all the Egyptians should be fully aware of the undeniable fact that these acts are only meant to spread corruption and chaos, which is why we all should stand together to eradicate those terrorists and extremists.

We ask Allah, the Almighty, to protect Egypt and its people, and to cause all the conspiracies of the aggressors futile

6. On ethics of war in Islam

Islam is a religion that promotes peace and peaceful coexistence among all mankind, and thus views the protection of the Muslim Ummah from any aggression as the principal reason behind waging any war against others, a fact which is crystal clear in the Quran; Allah, the Almighty, says: "And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits." (The Quran, 2:190) It is thus clear that war in Islam is conducted for a noble motive, which is the removal of oppression and injustice. In other words, it is only waged against those who commit aggression against Muslims.

Even at times of wars, Islam proves no brutal religion; it obliges its followers to firmly abide by a number of ethics and principles not to be violated or broken under any reason or circumstance, as follows: -

- 1- Not to kill aged men;
- 2- Not to kill young infants;
- 3- Not to kill women;
- 4- Not to be dishonest about booty;
- 5- Not to mutilate the dead bodies of the enemies;
- 6- Not to bring harm to the trees or burn them with fire;
- 7- Not to slay any of the enemy's flocks; and finally
- 8- Not to cause any harm to those people who devote their lives for to monastic services.

Any Muslim army that was about to conduct war in the Cause of Allah used to receive these above-mentioned instructions from Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and even from his companions after his (PBUH) death. In this regard, Imam Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) reported that he had heard that U‘mar Ibn A‘bd Al-A‘ziz wrote to one of his governors, "It has been passed down to us that when the Messenger of Allah, may Allah’s Peace and Blessings be upon him, sent out a raiding party (an army or expedition), he would say to them, 'Make your raids in the Name of Allah in the Cause of Allah. Fight whoever denies Allah. Do not steal from the booty, and do not act treacherously. Do not mutilate and do not kill children.' Say the same to your armies and raiding parties, Allah willing. Peace be upon you." (Muwatta’)

In conclusion, we strongly stress that the religion of Islam carries, in the very sense of the word, a message of mercy and peace for all humanity. Its ultimate objective is to foster peace, serenity, affection, kindness and mercy among all mankind, a fact which is crystal clear in the Quran: “O you men! Surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other ...” (The Quran, 49:13)

7. On lessons Deduced from the Farewell Sermon on Sanctity of Blood

Ten years after his (PBUH) migration (Hijra) to Medina, Prophet Muhammad went back to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam, and so many people attended it with him (PBUH). So, it was a great opportunity to highlight the main foundations of the religion to that large crowd of people.

On the 9th of Dhu Al-Hijjah, he (PBUH) delivered his most famous sermon known as the “Farwell Sermon” in which he (PBUH) projected the most important and essential pillars of the religion of Islam, starting with praising Allah, the Almighty, informing people of the sanctity of Mecca, the month of Dhu Al-Hijjah, and people’s bloods, properties, and honors.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “O People! Lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore, listen carefully to what I am saying and take these words to those who could not be present here today. O People! Just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your LORD, and that he will indeed reckon your deeds.”

With these luminous words of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we can start this article to ascertain how Islam sanctifies people’s lives and blood.

Islam instructs that man’s life is the most sanctified thing in this life, to the extent that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated clearly that the Muslim blood’s sanctity is holier in the Sight of Allah than the Sacred House, a fact which is proved by the Qur’an and the real practice of the Prophet (PBUH).

The Qur’an contains several verses proving this point and stressing that it is not permissible to kill Muslims or non-Muslims alike, without any legal reason approved by the Shari‘ah.

In the Chapter of An-Nisa’, Allah, Glorified is He, says: “And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is hell; he shall abide in it, and Allah will send

His wrath on him and curse him and prepare for him a painful chastisement.” (The Qur’an, 4:93);

In the Chapter of Al-Ma’ida, He, the Almighty, says: “On account of [his deed], We decreed to the children of Israel that if anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind.” (The Quran, 5:32);

In the Chapter of Al-Furqan, He, the Almighty, records the characteristics and features of His true believers, stating that one of these characteristics is that “And they who do not call upon another god with Allah and do not slay the soul, which Allah has forbidden except in the requirements of justice ...” (The Qur’an, 25:68) These verses undoubtedly affirm that man’s blood, under Islam, cannot be shed unless there is a legal reason approved by the Shari’ah, and which is shown in the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). In this regard, Imam Ibn Kathir, in his Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-‘Azim, quotes Mujahid who said: “Whoever slays a soul for no legal reason (approved by the Shari’ah), it is as if he had killed all mankind, since he will eternally abide in the Fire.”[1]

But, what is the position of the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) on this point?

The Sunnah of the Prophet, the second source of legislation in Islam, takes the very same position like the Quran. In so many Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stresses the sanctity of people’s blood. His (PBUH) statement in the Farewell Sermon is a case in point.

Also, he (PBUH) showed that the sanctity of man’s blood is even holier and greater than the entire life, saying: “The extinction of the whole world is less significant before Allah than killing a Muslim man.” (An-Nasa’i)

Emphasizing the fact that unlawful killing of a Muslim is the most serious sin ever in the world, he (PBUH) said: “If the inhabitants of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth all took part in shedding the blood of a believer, then Allah would cast them (all) in the Fire.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

Maintaining the fact that this ruling on the sanctity of bloods is not restricted to Muslims only, he (PBUH) said: “The first son of Adam takes a share of the guilt of every one who murders another wrongfully because he was the initiator of committing murder.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim); and “A faithful believer remains at liberty regarding his religion unless he kills somebody unlawfully.”

In brief, we can conclude that those who kill innocent people in the name of Islam are but criminals who act upon their own whims and accords, and that man’s life under Islam is totally protected and sanctified unless he violates this sanctity by committing any of its nullifiers shown in the Sunnah of the Prophet and which is the liability of the judiciary to decide on. (www.dar-alifta.com)

Conclusion and recommendations

The focus of this paper is on the role of *Ulama* towards countering the *boko haram* insurgency taking a clue from the efforts of the Al-Azhar *Ulama*. The paper traced the evolution, growth and teachings of the *boko haram* group and the launching of its insurgency in Nigeria. The paper also highlighted some of the efforts of ulemas and other Muslim organizations in converting the *boko haram* mayhem.

As mentioned earlier in this paper one of the distinctive features of Islam is the prominence attached to law in its practice. There is virtually nothing done in the religion or by a Muslim that

there is no law supporting it. In order to ascertain the position of Islam regarding anything, Muslims are enjoined to refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah (Practice of the Prophet) (surah 4:59) Therefore, *ulemas* being heirs of the prophets and messengers of Allah are duty bound to defend the lofty teachings of Islam from the deviant, misguided and erroneous beliefs of the extremist and insurgent groups. This is exactly what some of the Islamic Scholars in Nigeria have been doing since the emergence of the insurgent Boko haram group and this is what the Al-azhar scholars are doing in fighting similar groups in other Muslim states. However this paper wishes to make some recommendations as how our scholars can follow some of the approaches being adopted by the Al'azhar scholar's in dislocating the effect of the extremist and insurgent groups. Against this background therefore, these paper wish to make the following recommendations.

1. The supreme council for Islamic Affairs in liaison with some renowned Islamic associations such as the Muslim student's society, MASN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah wa iqamatissunnah (JIBWIS) can imitate from the Al-azhar ulama by pursuing a series of programs aimed at educating and sensitizing Muslims on the effect of extremism and how to counteract it.
2. Islamic educational bodies such as the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Islamic Education trust (IET} and Da'awah institute of Nigeria (DIN) should be encouraged by the well to do among the Muslims in their efforts towards the Islamisation of knowledge and publications of various literatures on Islam.
3. Department of Islamic studies in some Nigerian Universities such as Bayero University, Usmanu Danfodio University, Alqalam University, University of Maidugri, University of Ilorin and many others should be encouraged to mount up various academic programs, conferences and seminars aimed at enlightening the Muslim *Ummah* especially the youths on the authentic teachings of Islam. The mounting of a body such as the Al- Azhar Observer would be of great help in the obliteration of Boko haram ideologies in Nigeria.

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